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Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-ninth session
9-20 March 2015
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Statement submitted by Jesus Weeps over Africa, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

14-66290 (E) 050215

Please recycle

Statement

The situation of women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has developed significantly during this period – something that can be credited to the recommendations resulting from the Conference.

But before we describe that development, it would be useful to recall the main points of the Beijing Conference and the Declaration and Platform for Action adopted there by consensus.

From 4 to 15 September 1995, more than 30,000 people from 189 countries participated in the Fourth World Conference on Women, the objective of which was action for equality. The main topics covered at the conference included the advancement and self-reliance of women in the contexts of fundamental women's rights, women and poverty, women and decision-making, the girl child, violence against women and other issues of concern.

At the plenary session, a final document containing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was adopted by consensus.

The Declaration reflected the international community's commitment to the advancement of women and the implementation of the Platform for Action, ensuring that a gender perspective was applied to all policies and programmes at the national, regional and international levels over the next five years. If implemented, the Platform for Action would give women more power in the social, economic and political spheres, improve their health, facilitate their access to education and protect their reproductive rights.

Subsequently, several States have adopted programmes for the advancement of women. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a Ministry of Gender and Family has been established, as well as a number of associations fighting for equal rights for women. At the national level, there are women's networks such as the Réseau Femme et Développement (Women and Development Network) (REFED), which have branches in the provinces. In Bas-Congo, women have joined together to form cultural, religious and development associations and have clearly become aware of the disadvantaged situation they are in. With the help of State-run advancement programmes, girls are now competing in fields formerly reserved for men, such as aviation, electricity, mechanics and carpentry.

In a statement made in August 2013, the Minister of Gender, Women and Family, Ms. Inagosi, called on women to work hard to participate in the peace process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

She made the appeal at the presentation ceremony for newly appointed women in the justice sector, which she said was a chance to awaken women and to call on them to work hard because advancement was not handed on a plate but earned by merit.

The Minister said that the rise of women was the result of the implementation of the Government's action plan to implement United Nations Security Council resolution 1325.

The impact of the Beijing Conference has been felt beyond the capital Kinshasa, albeit less dramatically. Women are becoming aware of their role in development. There is increasing awareness of the need to train women in order to

give them equal access to information, education and training and power, in order to kick-start a harmonious, comprehensive and integrated development process. Women must enjoy social, economic, political and legal rights and be involved in concrete development efforts.

In Africa, as regards the African Union women have succeeded in claiming an equal share of commissioner posts (there are currently five women commissioners and five men). Following the Inter-Congolese Dialogue, women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have managed to achieve 30-per-cent participation in public and private institutions.

In Bas-Congo, women occupy the posts of Assistant Territorial Administrator in all territories, Deputy Mayor in the towns of Boma and Matadi and Vice-President of the Provincial Assembly. Our NGO, Jeweaf, is chaired by a man and coordinated or steered by a woman.

The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is not generally aware of the role it plays in increasing the tax burden on the civilian population comprising vulnerable groups, such as women, young girls and the elderly. Such people, who are at last seeking to escape from their predicament, once again become vulnerable when hit by such taxation.

Indeed, the budget allocated to the Ministry of Gender, Family and Children is ridiculous and is insufficient to effectively address the issue of equality and to implement the gender equality policy.

Rural women constitute the majority of our population, an estimated 80 per cent. Unfortunately, the Government pays little attention to the situation of such women, who are not recognized even though their status as agricultural employees entitles them to the rights enshrined in the Labour Code.

Farmers use antiquated and outdated agricultural tools, which make their work difficult. As they do not have the resources to abandon the use of such tools, they are unable to improve their living conditions. Women in rural areas are left to their sad fate and live in disadvantaged circumstances caused by a lack of education and information and cultural beliefs that are deeply rooted in an environment shaped by general and religious fundamentalism.

Despite all these strategies, programmes and commitments to international legal instruments, various forms of discrimination against women persist, which the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is steadily working to eliminate.

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Statement submitted by Latin American Committee for the Defence of Women's Rights, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Please recycle

Statement

Twenty years on from Beijing: progress made and commitments outstanding with regard to observation of the human rights of women in Latin America and the Caribbean

Two decades since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, gender and the rights of women have undoubtedly acquired prominence and visibility in various national, regional and international arenas and institutions, including the United Nations system itself.

With regard to the network's area of work, in 15 countries of the Latin American and Caribbean region, we wish to highlight that although legal advances and public policies that recognize the equal rights of women and men have been achieved, with broad support from feminist organizations, much remains to be done to ensure the effectiveness of their implementation and the fulfilment of established objectives.

There has been increased recognition of how equality can be promoted through institutional mechanisms for gender mainstreaming, which, with varying levels of independence depending on the country and, in the majority of cases, with small budgets, successfully cut across other government bodies.

Despite the passage of time, the feminization of poverty remains one of the main obstacles to women's development in contexts characterized by neoliberal globalization models that prioritize the over-exploitation of the environment and its resources, the accumulation of wealth and the protection of markets over human dignity, which has an impact particularly on the lives of women.

With regard to sexual and reproductive health as a fundamental human right, the enjoyment of that right is hindered by legal restrictions, such as those that limit the right to safe and cost-free abortions, or by sexual violence or danger to the life or health of women. Special attention should be paid to laws that criminalize the reproductive autonomy of women, such as those in Chile, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic.

With regard to violence against women, 20 years on from the adoption of the Convention of Belém do Pará, which 34 countries have ratified, only nine countries have established violence against women as a specific offence under their domestic legislation, within the framework of provisions on domestic violence. We draw attention to the retrograde step in Nicaraguan legislation in the form of the amendment of Act No. 779 to include mediation in cases of violence, which represents a failure to acknowledge unequal power relationships, puts women at greater risk and results in more impunity.

In addition, the criminalization of feminicide or femicide, while an important way to highlight the phenomenon of extreme violence against women, cannot be an isolated tool, as policies to prevent and eliminate such forms of extreme violence against women should take priority. It is also necessary to implement statistical and reporting systems that use methods compliant with methodological criteria that help to show the phenomenon in all true light.

We draw attention to the attacks and growing criminalization to which female human rights defenders are being subjected. In 2012, 414 attacks against such defenders were recorded in El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico, 118 of which were perpetrated in Mexico alone. Intimidation, physical assault and femicide have all been among the forms of abuse inflicted.

Girls' progressive enjoyment of their rights as human beings remains to be attained, and multiple violations of those rights continue. Gender-based violence against girls begins at a young age in home and school environments, which, according to studies, has a bearing on pregnancy among adolescents.

We call for the right to a non-sexist and anti-discriminatory education that fully addresses sexuality. The absence of such an education contributes to the high pregnancy rate among adolescents and perpetuates attitudes based on interpretations of biology or religion that are removed from scientific fact.

The Platform for Action does not end on its twentieth anniversary. The commitments made therein must be expanded insofar as they cut across other agendas of the United Nations system, such as the Cairo and post-2015 development agendas.

We believe that the goal of the Platform has not yet been achieved. We, the women of Latin America and the world, continue to call for gender equality, development and peace.

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Statement submitted by Collectif des femmes africaines du Hainaut, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Please recycle

Statement

Female empowerment: opportunities and challenges for the post-2015 agenda

Nearly 20 years ago, 189 countries adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a visionary roadmap for the promotion of women's rights and empowerment.

Experts have come together to lend momentum to this work and to assess how much progress has been made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals by the 2015 deadline, with a view to defining a new framework for international development. Their reports show that, even though economic growth has helped to swiftly reduce extreme poverty in China, India and other areas of Asia in which the majority of the region's poor are concentrated, progress has been slow in Africa, where the rate of extreme poverty is highest.

While improvements in gender equality among elected officials and the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in a number of countries have been hailed as achievements during the Beijing +20 review process, the situation with regard to the economic empowerment of women remains to be improved.

Women play an important role in development, but they are often excluded from development policies and particularly from the macroeconomic system. This trend demonstrates the need to improve policies in order to support the empowerment of African women, including both those in Africa and those who live abroad, who are made even more vulnerable by migration.

Women's empowerment presents both an opportunity and a challenge for the post-2015 agenda. The growth rate in Africa, although impressive, does not benefit the majority of the population, and particularly not women. This highlights the pressing need for industrialization and for the inclusion of women in the industrialization process. To achieve inclusive growth, women must both benefit from the rewards of growth and participate in the processes that stimulate it. In order to make women's empowerment a reality, women must be given the means to access the macroeconomy through the promotion of socio-economic resilience and the diversification and greater accessibility of sources of finance, with a view to sustainable human and economic development.

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Statement submitted by National Women's Council of Catalonia, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Please recycle

Statement

The year 2015 will mark the twentieth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a document that was signed by 189 countries at the Fourth World Conference on Women. That United Nations conference was a watershed for women's rights given that it incorporates earlier treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Platform established 12 critical areas of concern in the fight for gender equality and highlighted the steps that were needed in order to remove the obstacles that prevent the advancement of women. While it is not a legally binding document, it serves as a policy guide for Governments, institutions and NGOs.

Almost 20 years since that conference, which, as captured by its theme, invited us to "look at the world through women's eyes", we can assess how the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action has been implemented in each country and see how far we still are from fully achieving the objectives set out in 1995.

Violence

On 24 April 2008, the Parliament of Catalonia adopted Act No. 5/2008 on the right of women to eradicate gender-based violence, which established not only a support system but also an ideological framework on what constitutes gender-based violence, its causes and consequences and how public authorities can tackle it. The Act makes clear the importance of using the term "*machista*" (referring to sexism towards women), the rights of women and the network of services that is needed to provide support. It establishes very clearly that in the areas of prevention, detection, support and recovery, action must take a coordinated and interdisciplinary form.

In 2010, a decree regulating the activities of the National Commission for Coordinated Action against Gender-based Violence was adopted. The role of the Commission is to serve as the lead agency for institutional coordination in order to promote, follow up and evaluate measures taken by the departments of the Generalitat in addressing gender-based violence, and to develop the involvement of those departments and their cooperation with relevant civil society entities.

The Commission has established specific and distinct working groups. The group on female genital mutilation is currently very active. The group on the prevention of abusive relationships among young people and adolescents and the group on disabled women victims of gender-based violence have recently started their work, while other groups are still to be established.

In recent years in Catalonia, Act No. 5/2008 has continued to be developed and new services have been created to set up a support and recovery network for victims of gender-based violence: one municipal women's information and support service operating in each town of more than 20,000 inhabitants and one in each *comarca* (county), in accordance with the Act; and specialized intervention services, although the latter are not distributed evenly across Catalonian territory, which is why work is being undertaken to address the difficulties women have in accessing transport and resources in order to move between towns. It should be noted that the Service for Intervention in Serious Cases of Gender-based Violence has remained active despite a low budget.

Violence is the ultimate expression of the abuse of power, which must be fought on multiple fronts. It is therefore essential that women's organizations and bodies that implement prevention and detection programmes and other activities continue to be subsidized so that the network that women can use to enhance their skills and tackle gender-based violence can be supported.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights

The austerity crisis and resulting austerity policies, with their centralizing effect, have led to further social inequalities that have affected, among other areas, the health of women, particularly those in the most disadvantaged groups.

According to some statistical data and studies such as the Catalonia Health Survey 2012, the Caritas Survey 2013 and a perceptions study carried out by the National Women's Council of Catalonia in 2013, there has been an increase in psychological problems that affect mental health and lead to musculoskeletal pain and excessive medicalization. Among chronic illnesses, for example, not only has there been an increase in breast cancer, but women who suffer from that disease lack quality of life. Attention should also be drawn to problems during pregnancy, the birth of underweight and premature babies and reduced support with respect to related needs, such as those concerning breastfeeding. Furthermore, obstacles to health care include difficulty of access, waiting times and unsatisfactory care.

It is also important to highlight the loss of universal health care in Spain. Catalonia has sought to ensure coverage through regulation 15/2012 of the Catalonia Health Service, although there has been some opposition from specialized organizations that have said that the right of pregnant women to receive health-care cards is being violated despite the supposed guarantee. One of the most serious issues that has been raised is that women without a health-care card cannot access the public health system in order to terminate a pregnancy and have to seek a termination through the only available alternative service, which does not guarantee equal rights.

With regard to sexual and reproductive rights, Catalonia has always had one of the most extensive and integrated networks of services in Spain, although there has recently been a decrease in the number of professionals employed by those services, which is compounded when those staff are not replaced.

Economy and employment

The global economic crisis that began in 2008 also affected our country, which entered recession towards the end of that year. The at-risk-of-poverty rate, measured according to the Europe 2020 strategy, increased by 4.5 points in three years in Catalonia, from 22.2 per cent in 2009 to 26.7 per cent in 2011. The growth rate in Spain for the same period was 3.6 points, while in the eurozone it was 1.5 points.

One essential element of the fight against poverty and social exclusion is access to paid and decent work. In 2011, 10.5 per cent of the Catalan population lived in households in which adults between 18 to 59 years of age had worked less than 20 per cent of their work potential during the past year. In Spain, the figure for the same year was 12.2 per cent and in the European Union it was 10 per cent.

If we consider data gathered by the Statistics Institute of Catalonia (concerning, for example, poverty risk and difficulty in meeting financial

obligations by the end of each month) from the gender perspective, we can see that women are clearly disadvantaged. In addition, policies have been adopted that equate to a step backward for recently acquired rights which allowed women to integrate further into the labour market and facilitated their financial independence and personal autonomy.

In the second quarter of 2014, according to the Economically Active Population Survey conducted by the National Statistics Institute, the employment rate for women remained below that for men (57.9 per cent in contrast to 67.8 per cent). The pay gap is growing and female unemployment is increasing, especially among young people. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to create jobs for young women and women over 55, because unemployment will affect their retirement.

It is important to remember that the development of women has a bearing on that of their children, who consequently face reduced quality of life, which may have grave repercussions for their future.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the women who are most affected by poverty and most socially vulnerable include the elderly, single mothers, women who live in isolated rural areas, are of different cultural origin or have unconventional sexual preferences or identities and women with disabilities.

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Statement submitted by NGO Coordination post Beijing Switzerland, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Please recycle

Statement

Twenty years have passed since the landmark publication of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at the Fourth World Conference on Women. The time has now come to assess how much progress has been made.

NGO Coordination post Beijing Switzerland asks the Commission on the Status of Women to include the following points in its conclusions:

- The progress made in each Member State should be recognized. The follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action must build on this progress.
- No country has yet achieved full equality. The Beijing Platform for Action should be fully implemented in every State, regardless of the State's level of development. The human rights of every person, no matter what their gender, should be recognized, and all forms of discrimination should be eliminated.
- By implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, societies will have to adapt by using measures such as gender mainstreaming – assessing all actions from a gender perspective – in order to challenge stereotypes linked to local traditions. Gender mainstreaming also helps to achieve the specific goal of overcoming inequalities between men and women in the forthcoming post-2015 sustainable development programme, which is due to be adopted at the United Nations General Assembly session in September 2015.
- States must invest the human and financial resources needed to implement the Beijing Platform for Action. If they do rely on civil society bodies to carry out certain tasks or to help them set up the institutional mechanisms needed to promote women, they must ensure that such bodies remain structurally and financially secure. The system of project- or service-related subsidy does not enable civil society bodies to work independently, which is essential for critical and efficient collaboration.

It is now time to go beyond the debate about development or human rights. It is time to stop quibbling about the text of the Beijing Platform for Action, and to stop revisiting particular paragraphs to contest already approved wording. It is now time to implement the Platform for Action without delay, and to take any measures needed to achieve true equality between men and women.

Women have recently suffered a number of serious setbacks. The shocking statements issued by armed groups in Iraq, Syria and Nigeria are only the visible part of a far more insidious groundswell affecting even the most open and progressive societies.

The time has come to act and to reaffirm the relevance of the Platform for Action in 2015. We make these requests on the basis of our experiences in Switzerland. Our country may seem like a paradise, but women's rights and circumstances do not depend solely on the level of development of the country in which they live.

Admittedly, effective equality has been achieved in training and education. For several years now, more women have graduated from university than men, for example. The average standard of living for women in Switzerland is higher than that for women in other countries. Women in our country are guaranteed access to

basic care. And our national and cantonal governments have taken numerous steps to promote and achieve gender equality.

Nevertheless, inequalities remain in all of the critical areas of concern of the Platform for Action. The Swiss Government itself recognized this fact in its report to UN Women in preparation for this session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

These inequalities are largely linked to stereotypes that are deeply embedded in our collective references, of which we are often not aware. Too often they are encouraged by the media, both through traditional media and through new media, such as social networks. Attempts to promote female role models and capable figures of authority must compete with the hypersexualization of women and girls. Swiss women members of parliament are once again complaining of inappropriate comments made by some of their male colleagues to the total indifference of the other members of parliament. Meanwhile, gender violence is difficult to identify in a culture that believes it has overcome all inequalities between men and women. Stereotypes also affect women's choices regarding profession, level of occupation, involvement in unpaid care work (in families or communities) and access to a salary equivalent to that earned by men (regardless of the fact that this has been expressly provided for in the Swiss Constitution since 1981 and in a federal law since 1996).

These inequalities are also linked, however, to the fact that equality in law does not necessarily mean equality in fact. Women are protected by a whole series of legislative instruments. Nonetheless, these laws are not always put into practice. This can be seen, for example, in cases of domestic violence, where some proceedings are abandoned despite the obligation on the part of the authorities to prosecute ex officio, or in the trafficking in and exploitation of human beings, where victims are sometimes only identified if the official responsible for the case is feeling charitable. It is also manifested, highly significantly, in the area of pay equality, where there are not enough points of comparison to enable women to initiate legal proceedings, and where the Swiss State does not have enough resources to conduct systematic economic research. The Federal Office for Gender Equality is only able to examine a few such cases per year, and only those concerning companies that sell services to the Swiss Confederation. Nevertheless, in October 2014, the Federal Council decided to take new measures to guarantee pay equality across Switzerland.

Women continue to suffer discrimination, which prevents them from reaching decision-making posts in both the public and private sectors. Companies that are found wanting in this regard often argue that women do not do enough to demonstrate their abilities and their desire to take up such posts, and that women are not easily persuaded. These arguments clearly reveal the extent to which women are expected to act like men in order to reach positions of responsibility, and that not enough attention is given to the fact that women are women and have a different way of analyzing situations, responding to requests and dealing with authority. This once again relates to the issue of stereotypes and defined gender roles. Similarly, if a man wishes to pursue a career in a female-dominated profession, his masculinity is called into question.

Assessing public activities from a gender perspective – gender mainstreaming – is promoted by Switzerland in its external policies but is still not being applied in Switzerland itself, except in a handful of towns and one federal department. This important structural advance arising from Beijing has not yet been successfully

applied at the level of national or cantonal government in Switzerland. Cantons and towns established equality offices and departments in response to the Swiss national action plan. However, following a number of budgetary cuts, these offices and departments were merged with other offices, or even shut down. The Federal Tribunal, however, recalled that these entities were part of a commitment to apply the constitutional provision on gender equality, and that that sometimes required institutional and organizational measures to be put in place.

Following the introduction of some institutional mechanisms many politicians and administrative bodies have high expectations of civil society. Swiss society has a large number of associations, and the bodies defending women's rights are often associations that receive little financial backing. Owing to the fact that women on average do not possess the same financial means as men, they cannot provide a great deal of financial support for the work of the associations to which they belong, as a consequence of which such associations tend to suffer from a lack of funding. Associations therefore need basic funding to enable them to meet the expectations of their members and of the Confederation.

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Statement submitted by *Regards de femmes*, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

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Please recycle

Statement

Regards de femmes works in France and around the world, in partnership with a very large number of women's rights associations, to ensure that all domains, both public and private, offer women and girls security, equality, recognition and respect for their dignity. Those areas of autonomy and freedom allow women to study, receive medical care, be tried in court, work and flourish, together with men and other women.

In order to work towards the equality of rights, responsibilities and dignity between men and women, including women with disabilities, *Regards de femmes* refers to:

- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Article 5 urges States parties to take all appropriate measures to modify the social and cultural attitudes of men and women, with a view to eliminating prejudices and customary practices that are based on gender-based inequality and stereotypes
- The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, which includes all forms of threat, harm or physical, sexual and psychological violence
- The Beijing Platform for Action: Violence against women is "the most pervasive yet least recognized human rights abuse in the world" and article 124 of the Platform for Action states that Governments should "condemn violence against women and refrain from invoking any custom, tradition or religious consideration to avoid their obligations with respect to its elimination as set out in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women"
- The Millennium Development Goals.

In order for girls to achieve autonomy and emancipation, a non-patriarchal education for both girls and boys is essential. That will give girls access to professional activities and combat gender-based violence.

The economic and financial crisis should not lead to the deterioration of women's rights; on the contrary it should provide a window of opportunity. The crisis can only be overcome through the emancipation of women in all areas, including economic fields, in order to achieve equality between women and men at all levels of decision-making.

Certain traditional or religious practices, models and constraints preclude the full recognition of women's capabilities and effective rights.

The elimination of humiliation, discrimination and violence suffered or "chosen" by women or committed against women, including in the name of religion or custom, must be ensured by all Governments and States that have signed the above-mentioned Conventions, Declaration and Platform for Action.

In France, as in all countries around the world, women's rights and dignity are increasingly being attacked in the name of tradition, custom or religious practices. It should be reiterated that freedom of conscience, a fundamental human right, is inextricably linked to the neutrality of States with regard to philosophical choices

and personal beliefs. Both should remain in the private domain, since displaying or imposing them can insult the beliefs of others.

In order that we can live together in mutual respect and rise above differences, *Regards de femmes* promotes secularism – a powerful tool of universal emancipation that provides women with strength and protection.

The measures taken include:

Enshrining in the post-2015 development agenda the obligation to register births

Article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that every child shall have the right to a name and nationality and that boys and girls must be registered immediately after birth.

According to UNICEF, 60 million births worldwide fail to be registered every year. The absence of civil status constitutes a mechanism for social exclusion.

In certain countries, patriarchal laws on the nationality of children and gender-based discrimination that prohibits mothers from declaring births or accessing the necessary education or health care hinder the registration of births. Those mothers and children generally belong to ethnic minorities and live in rural areas. Violence, exclusion and poverty are thus perpetuated.

Birth certificates provide each individual with proof of identity. They must be presented during civil procedures (marriage, inheritance, divorce, death) and administrative procedures (enrolment in educational institutions, registration on electoral rolls, access to health care, employment and identity documents, etc.).

Girls that do not have civil status are like ghosts. Their rights are flouted. Without an identity, they are invisible to development programmes but are coveted by human traffickers.

It is vital to make these invisible girls visible so that they may access the numerous programmes that target the various tradition-related, patriarchal, financial and geographical obstacles, thus ensuring their security and emancipation.

Combating economic, psychological, physical and sexual violence

Violence against women and girls is a fundamental obstacle to equality between men and woman and is a violation of women's rights – the right to mental, psychological and physical integrity, the right to dignity, the right to fundamental freedoms, the right to freedom of movement without constraints linked to being a woman, the right to security and the right to life.

Rape, prostitution, female genital mutilation, marital and domestic violence, sexual harassment at the workplace and in the public domain, forced marriage, "honour" crimes, polygamy, female circumcision and the sexual abuse of children result from a historical patriarchal system that is based on male domination over women, whatever their age, social status, sexual orientation or origin.

Prostitution and archaic chauvinistic violence

The system of prostitution is one of the pillars of sexual inequality and violence against women. It is contrary to human dignity and equality between people and is a manifestation of an archaic patriarchal system. It causes the

humiliation and degradation of women, without taboo, in the interest of male domination and female submission.

It constitutes the appropriation of another person's sexuality using power generated by money, and targets those who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation because of personal reasons or financial difficulties. The vast majority of prostituted persons have suffered psychological or sexual violence that has destroyed their self-esteem and respect for their own and other people's bodies. It is vital to help them regain their self-respect.

In order to eliminate all forms of gender-based violence, the procurement of sex must be prohibited by law. Human bodies are not goods and must be protected from all exploitation and commercialization.

That prohibition is the foundation for all non-sexist education aimed at ensuring that children, both girls and boys, are able to mature into adults that respect their own bodies and the bodies of others.

Such violence can be eradicated by the implementation of the Palermo protocol on prostitution and trafficking in persons, the punishment of individuals that procure sex, the repeal of punishments for prostituted persons and the establishment of occupational reintegration policies for all those wishing to escape the clutches of prostitution.

Violence resulting from patriarchal customs and traditions

While in France the law protects all girls and women from violence committed in the name of tradition or religion, families impose the customs of their countries of origin on girls and women. *Regards de femmes* warns against and reacts strongly to two such key forms of violence.

Female circumcision

This form of violence can be committed against girl-children in France or when their parents go on holiday to their countries of origin.

French law defines female circumcision as a form of female genital mutilation: The offence of "mutilation" is aggravated if carried out by persons with authority (parents); "genital" relates to sexual offences – when such offences are committed abroad by persons ordinarily residing in France, those persons shall be prosecuted upon their return to French territory.

Forced marriage

In France, young girls are subject to early marriage and pregnancy according to the customs of their countries of origin. Nevertheless, the age of consent for both girls and boys is 18 and civil marriage – the only form of marriage recognized by law – must precede any religious "marriage" ceremony. However, parents flout the law by organizing religious marriages for underage girls (sometimes aged under 15).

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Statement submitted by Royal Academy of Science International Trust, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

14-66299 (E) 160115

Please recycle

Statement

Women's health for development: Beijing+20

The milestone in which the world has crossed in terms of social, humanitarian and gender related achievements is not only highly significant, but also remarkable as they are the result of extensive research in addition to countless international and national efforts. However to many underprivileged populations and societies, Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control" remains a farfetched target.

The connection between women, health and societal development has been greatly disregarded until recently. National, regional and international efforts are being invested in expanding the scope of women's health beyond reproductive and sexual health because there is more to women's health than the maternal facet of it. Health is perhaps one of the most significant aspects, if not the sole one, where women experience risk factors. Women's health deserves much more attention due to biological and behavioural influences.

The Beijing+20's platform of action includes the promotion and dissemination of research and information on women's health in order to translate knowledge into practice for more effective and efficient results in women's health advancement and development. The breadth and width of Women's health is far from merely being reproductive health and sexual health. Women's health comprises of biological differences in non-communicable diseases. Women's health includes mental well-being. Women's health is affected by lifestyle. Above all Women's health lacks the needed research for tailoring action plans and practices.

We have to acknowledge that there are sex disparities and biological differences in diseases prevailing in both genders, especially non-communicable diseases. According to the World Health Organization, cardiovascular diseases are projected to remain the single leading cause of death. Knowing that cardiovascular diseases are often thought to be a "male" problem, it is the number one killer of women. Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease, a life threatening lung disease, still affects more women than men due to the biological factor in women participating in the gender's vulnerability towards Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease. It is a common fact by now that women are affected by depression more than men. It is not a common fact that in 2012, the World Health Organization named depression to be the second leading cause of death by the year 2020. However, this is not well acknowledged, causing delays in treatment-seeking and diagnosis among women.

After the challenges and the achievements in the Millennium Development Goals, the world now faces yet another challenge: the sustainable development goals and its role in promoting gender equality and empowering women. As civil, scientific, professional, national and international communities there is a huge necessity to create a central strategy that can promote the issue of Women's Health from an awareness into a call to action, now. There is a desperate need for an

investment to support the productivity of society and its development throughout its primary health givers, the Women.

Investing in each woman's health is investing in every family's health, thus promoting and safeguarding the society's health and well-being. As the World Youth Representative for the Royal Academy of Science International Trust, I believe that the call for action shall start now at all community levels including the Youth. The Youth are the leaders of tomorrow. Let's empower and enable our youth to make them agents of change so that our tomorrow becomes today.

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Statement submitted by *Solidarité agissante pour le développement familial*, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Please recycle

Statement

Solidarité agissante pour le développement familial (SADF), having been mindful since 1995 of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the compelling statements made therein, namely the resolution to promote equality, development and peace for all women throughout the world for the benefit of humanity as a whole, wishes to present, on behalf of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the following response relating to the United Nations post-2015 action plan.

The progress made in meeting that objective is encouraging and several African countries are performing very well, in particular with regard to gender equality in primary education and the number of seats occupied by women in national parliaments. There is still work to be done to ensure equal rights for girls in secondary and higher education, and the further promotion of women's access to paid work outside the agricultural sector remains a challenge, despite some reported progress.

However, the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment continues to be hindered by certain cultural practices (early marriage, preference given to boys with regard to schooling and power relations within the family) and the lack of economic and employment opportunities (access to markets, capital and professional training; patriarchal influence) and political opportunities (lack of political training) for women.

In order to foster progress, it is vital to initiate a cultural transformation that will reverse negative attitudes towards gender equality and women's empowerment in certain societies, particularly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Public policy should be refocused to tackle discrimination against girls and women in the education system and gender-based discrimination in relation to access to education, economic opportunities and employment, in order to ensure the increased participation of women in economic and productive activities and to involve them in decision-making at all levels of society. To achieve that goal, it will be essential to implement economic and social policies that better meet the needs of both men and women. In particular, that will mean drawing up positive discrimination strategies to benefit women, reforming those aspects of customary law that are detrimental to women and girls and allocating increased human and financial resources to the enforcement of relevant provisions.

SADF calls on the United Nations, and the African States in particular, to transform the political will demonstrated into concrete action by:

- Establishing suitable and practical regulatory frameworks
- Establishing strong institutions managed by competent individuals of integrity
- Providing sufficient material and financial resources
- Adopting positive discrimination strategies that benefit women in order to boost gender equality and empower women, in particular:
    - Harsher penalties for offences relating to sexual harassment, early marriage, the rape of minors and violence against female pupils
    - The introduction of scholarships for girls from poor families

- The allocation of training grants and fee exemptions for women and girls in training colleges
- The creation of a women's bank to fund women's projects.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, we the members of SADF will spare no effort in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women by implementing the recommendations and strategies enshrined in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

We believe that, together, we can help to build a new society based on justice, love and respect for human dignity.

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Statement submitted by SOS Éducation, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Please recycle

Statement

In third world countries, women constitute a vital link in the development process; however, they continue to be limited by their status as women.

In Africa — and in particular in Côte d'Ivoire — the struggles undertaken by human rights organizations and women's associations have helped to achieve progress with regard to respect for women's rights. While work remains to be done, there has been an overall improvement. Women perform administrative roles (directors, secretaries, nurses, prefects, sub-prefects, etc.) and occupy political positions (mayors, presidents, members of parliament, council members, etc.).

The Ivorian authorities have also passed laws that strengthen gender equality, encourage the recruitment of more women to public office, increase the minimum wage, prevent the enslavement and ill-treatment of women, combat early pregnancy in schools, prevent forced marriages, etc.

However, such efforts are insufficient, as scarcely 30 per cent of women occupy leadership positions in public administration and the political arena.

Furthermore, respect for women's rights is hindered significantly by traditional attitudes; in villages, illiteracy and traditional beliefs contribute to the lack of respect for those rights. Village dwellers are unaware of the importance of women's rights in their communities. That is why we are urging governments to focus on suppressing violations and raising awareness. Local authorities, members of parliament, mayors and human rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should all play a part in ensuring a better understanding among parents of the importance and benefits of respecting women's rights.

Alongside such efforts, governments should combat poverty among women by funding income-generating activities. That would enable women to be independent of men, to feed themselves and their families and to fulfil their own needs without the help of men. Only then will they be able to enjoy the respect they deserve.

Lastly, we would like to express our thanks to the NGOs and to all those who work to restore women's dignity. Thank you.

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Statement submitted by Stichting Rutgers WPF, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

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Please recycle

Statement

Moving forward to engage men and boys in the gender equality agenda

With this written statement RutgersWPF, member of the global MenEngage Alliance, provides suggestions on how to take the Beijing Platform for Action agenda forward, by engaging men and boys in achieving gender equality. The 59th session of the Commission on the Status of Women will also address opportunities for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women in the post-2015 development agenda. We therefore also provide concrete recommendations for inclusion in the new global Post-2015 Development Agenda to maintain the momentum on addressing gender inequalities, strengthening human rights, and promoting women's empowerment.

We stand with gender equality and women's rights advocates to address continuing gender inequalities and women's human rights violations. Since the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, the international community has achieved significant advances in the rights and well-being of women and girls — including in health, education, political participation, and income. But we are not there yet.

We believe that gender equality can only be achieved when underlying patterns related to patriarchy are transformed into values based on equality and through also engaging men and boys. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action includes engagement of men and boys as a critical piece for advancing gender equality. Beyond the nominal or symbolic involvement of men, the Beijing framework envisions male engagement as a necessary means to challenge the structures, beliefs, practices, and institutions that regard heterosexuality as the norm, that sustain men's aggregate privileges, inequalities between women and men, and dominant male stereotypes.

We urge governments, United Nations agencies, civil society, and the private sector to move forward in joint efforts, challenging power dynamics that increase gender inequalities, including by actively engaging men and boys. Women's empowerment is essential to achieving gender equality. We must simultaneously engage men to be actively involved and committed to redistributing power and privilege in their personal lives and in larger spheres.

The following recommendations are based on the discussion paper "Men, Masculinities, and Changing Power: A Review of Engaging Men in Gender Equality from Beijing 1995 to 2015" that was prepared for the 2nd worldwide MenEngage Global Symposium "Working With Men and Boys on Gender Justice" from 10-13 November 2014, New Delhi, India.

Recommendations

- Broaden the discussion about how gender norms affect both women and men. Throughout the world, there continue to be strong social and cultural norms that perpetuate power imbalances between men and women. While men usually have more agency than the women in their lives, men's decisions and behaviours are also profoundly shaped by rigid social and cultural expectations related to masculinity. Broadening the discussion to how gender norms affect men and women in all their (sexual) diversity, can help us to

better understand the complex ways that rigid gender norms and power relations burden our societies, and to more effectively engage men and boys in reflections about inequalities and change.

- Seek to understand and encourage men's various roles within the agenda for gender equality, including as gatekeepers, partners, stakeholders, and co-beneficiaries. Besides common framings of men's roles as gatekeepers or partners, there is evidence that we should also approach men as stakeholders and co-beneficiaries in advancing gender equality. In addition to broader ethical and social gains, men as individuals can have much to gain from increased equality. Viewing men as stakeholders in gender equality and crafting positive messages of opportunity and benefits can help to draw more men in.

- Build and act through alliances between men's work for gender equality and the women's rights fields and other social justice movements. Leaders and organizations in the field of gender equality should create ongoing dialogue and collaboration across the many diverse groups and movements involved in promoting gender equality. This requires women's empowerment and rights organizations, organizations working with men and boys, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer organizations, youth organizations, child rights organizations to find each other in common ground and to actively cooperate, pursuing a common cause. Many activists and organizations engaging men and boys already actively seek to align their work with women's movements.

- Take gender-inclusive work with men from the program and project level into policies and institutions. Over the last two decades since Beijing, initiatives that focus on or are inclusive of men as active participants and beneficiaries of gender equality have generally been short-term projects, often reaching relatively small numbers of men at a time, and often in contexts where social norms, policies, and other structural factors continue to limit the potential for broader transformations. Accelerating change requires reaching larger numbers of men and boys and changing systems and institutions. Given the critical role of public institutions in the creation and maintenance of gender norms, and their potential to reach large numbers of individuals, they provide particularly strategic locations for scaling up efforts to engage men and boys.

- Develop, implement and monitor policies to engage men in gender equality and build state capacity to implement them. There is a need to push forward with institutional and governmental policies that address the social and structural determinants of gender inequalities. Equally important is the building of trained staff to implement policies, as well as ongoing public awareness campaigns to transform perceptions of gender roles among men.

- Employ research that seeks to understand the ways in which men and boys are already changing. Political activism and legislation are an important part of catalysing change. There is an additional need for increased research on the many ways in which men and boys are moving toward and living out gender equality, in order to identify ways to support and speed up the change that is already happening. This includes building knowledge on backlash; circumstances and contexts where masculinities and power relations are becoming more rigid, including conflict, high unemployment rates, and migration.

- Engage men in the prevention of gender-based violence. Integrated policies should include primary prevention, targeting men and boys; policies to engage men and boys in making public spaces free of violence for women and girls; programs, for men who have used violence, that are integrated with the judicial and social sector; implementation of gun control; control over alcohol sales; and legal, financial and psychosocial support for survivors of violence.

- Promote gender equitable socialization at all levels of education, from early childhood education to the tertiary level. Comprehensive, gender-transformative sexuality education should be an integral part of school curricula, including human rights, gender equality, and sexual and reproductive health and rights. Curricula should challenge gender stereotypes and encourage critical thinking. Teachers and administrators should be trained and supported to provide gender-sensitive learning environments.

- Engage men as fathers and caregivers. Besides more progressive paternity leave policies and training health care workers to positively involve men in pre-natal care services, there is a need for ongoing public awareness campaigns and education to transform perceptions of caregiving roles among men. Publicly supported fatherhood preparation courses and campaigns focusing on men's roles in the lives of children can address fathers' reported feelings of being unprepared for caregiving, and help men perceive benefits from greater participation.

- Engage men in supporting women's economic empowerment and commit men to an equal share in household and care work. A key policy entry-point for engaging men to support women's economic empowerment entails redistributing caregiving responsibilities, as an enabling factor for women in pursuing economic opportunities. Men also have an important role to play in advocating for and supporting policies to address inequalities in the workforce. Furthermore, the equal sharing of unpaid care work between men and women reduces the disproportionate share of unpaid care work for women and girls and changes attitudes that reinforce the gendered division of labour.

- Engage men as supportive partners, clients and positive agents of change in sexual and reproductive health and rights, and maternal, newborn and child health. We must continue to promote accessible sexual and reproductive health services and rights for women. We must also engage men and boys in transforming the rigid norms that shape sexual and reproductive health outcomes. Comprehensive sexuality education that promotes a critical reflection about gender norms is an essential component of engaging men and boys in sexual health. Policies should also seek to expand the availability and use of male methods, and create additional spaces for men to take responsibilities in prenatal and child health services.

Suggestions on targets and indicators to operationalize the above recommendations: http://menengage.org/resources/menengage-comments-open-working-group-draft-report-sustainable-development-goals-sdgs/.

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Statement submitted by Tchad agir pour l'environnement, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

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Please recycle

Statement

Statement by Tchad agir pour l'environnement (TCHAPE) delivered to the Commission on the Status of Women at its fifty-ninth session, held in New York: The situation of women in Chad

Madam Chairperson,

In accordance with the commitments undertaken at the Fourth World Conference on Women held in China in September 1995, a large number of measures have been taken to support Chadian women. They include, in particular, measures to combat poverty, ensure schooling for young girls, provide health care for mothers and children, empower women and ensure their access to resources and recognize the vital role of women in society.

The status of Chadian women has undeniably improved in recent decades, notably in the area of education and professional activity. Chadian women have now acquired a status they did not enjoy a few years ago, despite certain forms of discrimination that persist owing to the weight of sociocultural tradition, the erroneous interpretation of religious teachings and resistance on the part of men. The more educated and skilled a woman is, the better chance she has of accessing leadership positions and exercising influence.

However, inequality between men and women persists and remains a major obstacle to national development. Despite the fact that the country has undergone a process of democratization, and despite advocacy and policies to promote Chadian women in the areas of literacy, schooling, health, employment, administration, politics and development, the gulf between men and women remains significant in Chad.

It is true that the recurring civil wars suffered by Chad since it gained independence on 11 August 1960 have broken down the socioeconomic, political and cultural fabric of the country and have helped to confine Chadian women to their traditional role as mothers and wives, rather than allowing them to act also as drivers of development who are responsible both for their families and the future of their country. Yet women constitute more than 50 per cent of the Chadian population.

We encourage the Government of Chad to pursue its various commendable efforts and its mobilization to promote women's welfare. Such action also requires ongoing international cooperation and assistance. The political will exists, as is demonstrated by one of the forceful statements made by the Chadian Head of State upon his inauguration in relation to women, whom he described as a lever for the socioeconomic development of our society. Such statements are at risk of becoming empty slogans if they are not followed by concrete actions.

That is why we call on the public authorities to pursue their efforts to fully engage women in decision-making and to enforce requirements relating to the representation of Chadian women in political and administrative bodies. It is also important that the draft Code on the Person and the Family be adopted in order to give Chadian women their proper place in national development.

As they become increasingly aware of their situation, Chadian women are trying to step out of the traditional framework that has been mapped out for them and to enjoy the important role they play in economic productivity and social reproduction so that they can improve their current situation, each according to her own abilities, qualities and starting point.

We condemn the unacceptable conduct of some midwives who, rather than respecting professional conduct with respect to the care and treatment of patients and compassion towards them, unfortunately engage in the ill treatment of pregnant women. Such practices take the form of physical and psychological violence (such as psychological harassment, abuse and the deprivation of rights).

We strongly condemn such practices, which damage the reputation of honest women who work in the same profession in accordance with ethical standards and principles. It is important that the perpetrators of such acts should be prosecuted before the competent courts in order to ensure justice for the victims.

This situation leads many women to choose to give birth at home despite the risks that home births present, rather than go to hospital, which is associated with ill treatment and painful childbirth. Therefore, births are not registered with a civil registrar. Many children are born in such conditions and consequently do not appear in the register of births. This has a negative impact on national statistics and consequently on national development.

However, it should be noted that Chad has made maternal and child health one of its priorities for development and continues to raise awareness in order to eradicate such practices.

We encourage the Government to pursue its efforts to raise general awareness so that women arriving at hospitals or maternity wards are not concerned in any way and are offered the necessary support up to the time of delivery. Maternal and reproductive health is recognized as one of the most important factors in a country's development and should therefore be at the centre of our concerns, thoughts and actions.

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Statement submitted by Union Women's Center, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

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* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Please recycle

Statement

Commitment to gender equality and the advancement of women's rights

Gender equality is not only a human rights issue, but is also an essential component of sustainable development, social justice, peace, and security. To address the rights of women, Georgia has dynamically carried out complex measures, including the legislative framework as well as the corresponding practices and implementation of all novelties with active participations of the civil society. Georgia belongs to that group of countries were the ideology of gender equality and traditional attitudes are based on gender stereotypes.

The country has endorsed international obligations to fight discrimination against women and has expressed political will by adopting laws addressing gender equality, domestic violence and human trafficking while striving to adopt principles of Democracy. Still these commitments need to be translated more into practice. Georgia's national legislation is not gender sensitive and state policies and strategies lack gender mainstreaming. In addition, stereotypes, deeply rooted gender roles, and women's own lack of awareness of their rights prevent them from fully enjoying their freedoms and rights. The women's movement in Georgia has to be more consolidated and stronger to promote women's advancement.

The Government of Georgia, sought to pursue women's advancement and gender mainstreaming in policy and practice after the 4th World Conference on Women and after the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action. However, this attempt could not bring any substantive change or real positive development to the status and rights of women in Georgia.

Georgia expressed its readiness to fight discrimination against women and support the establishment of gender equality when it joined the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1994, thereby giving hope to many for a real commitment followed up by concrete steps for achieving greater gender equality in the country. In line with the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, Georgia is expected to fulfil obligations endorsed by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 for increasing women's role in peace-building and conflict transformation and the Millennium Development Goal #3 on Promoting Gender Equality and Empowering Women, by 2015. However, women's and civil society groups in Georgia have always criticized these efforts, claiming that the state is not sufficiently committed to accomplishing its international and domestic obligations.

Emerging issues for women in Georgia

Abortion remains the major birth control method in Georgia. Definitely, the introduction of various family planning methods have had a positive impact on the health of women in the last few years, however, many young women still do not have access to information or resources about reproductive health services. Not only does the Government in Georgia neglect to provide sufficient access for youth to family planning and services, but the issue of Reproductive Health of youth itself is not prioritized in the government policies. The two main reasons for these problems

are as follows. The first is related to a strong influence of religion in Georgia. The second is connected with an absence of policy to increase the level of contraceptive use among youth and the absence of youth friendly services coupled with education on Reproductive health at schools and universities.

Early marriage is considered to be one of the major problems. According to the report of Public Defender of Georgia in total 7367 girls were prevented from their education at schools during 2011-2013 year. In case of early marriage boys and girls are forced to stop receiving education at schools and focus on housework or start working.

There is no separate legal provision regarding early marriage in the Georgian Civil Code, but according to the general context it seems that the marriage could be registered even in the case if a person has not reached the age of 18.

It is therefore necessary to carry out educational and prevention activities on child early marriage and to add preventive legal provision regarding early marriage in the Georgian Legislation.

Sex-selection abortion is a cultural phenomenon and indicates that there is gender imbalance in the country. This is harmful for the population and results in further social disorder as well as an increase of crime and violation of human rights, increased trafficking and sexual exploitation. It is necessary to formulate relevant policies and programmes, including population awareness raising, to address the problem and develop institutionalized mechanisms for gender mainstreaming in the health sector.

Domestic violence

In 2006, Georgia adopted Law on the Elimination of Domestic Violence. This law was later substantially amended in 2009. These amendments included clauses to strengthen the referral system in cases of domestic violence, and to introduce criminal charges or violations of civil protection orders. Domestic violence became a specific criminal offence in 2012, with the adoption of a package of amendments to the country's Criminal Code. No information was found regarding the existence or otherwise of a mechanism to oversee the implementation of the new criminal law on domestic violence.

A report on domestic violence by the United Nations Population Fund based on survey research published in 2010 found that in practice, the law is poorly implemented, and the national-level mechanism to prevent and respond to domestic violence cases has not been implemented.

Particular attention should be given to the preparation work towards the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention).

The most efficient way to solve the stereotypical approaches, religious and patriarchal belief, is to integrate gender equality issues into the field of education and public awareness, all groups of society must have equal access. In addition, to improve the legislation with regards to gender equality, National Action Plan, the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia must take responsibility to undertake awareness-raising activity, which among other things will be included in curriculum

based programmes at vocational and higher education levels, in re-qualification programmes for doctors and social workers. Gender equality aspects should be considered in developing pre-school concept as well.

Georgia has a sound number of ethnic minorities. Ethnic minority women face cultural and language constraints, violation of human rights and lack of access to information and skills that hinders their integration and development.

Although other minority groups of women, e.g. sexual minorities, manage to organize themselves and cooperate with a few women's Non-Governmental Organizations, they face absolute isolation and discrimination from society.

Due to the two ethnic conflicts, Georgia has a large number of internally displaced persons. The 2009-2012 State Strategy on Internally Displaced Persons has gender aspects, but internally displaced women and rural women are in most vulnerable conditions resulting in low economic status and poverty and having less access to information, rights and skills.

Although Georgia has adopted broad democratic reforms, it has not yet expressed enough commitment to achieving gender equality. While there is a need for more commitment — political, financial and human resources — for addressing broader gender equality issues, instead most of the pressure comes from international organizations. Georgia strives for accession to the European Union, it should note that combating gender discrimination and introducing equality in programs and policies is one of the core principles the European Union considers for future Member States. Adherence to such principles guarantees the establishment of effective and sustainable democracies, inclusive and diverse societies and equal opportunities for community members.

We therefore urge Georgia to base its policies, laws and programmes on gender equality principles. And under the new post 2015 sustainable development framework to further encourage the Government to strengthen initiatives regarding gender based violence, sexual reproductive health and rights of gender equality.

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Statement submitted by Women in Alternative Action, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

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Statement

Women in Alternative Action is a Cameroonian non-governmental organization whose aim is to promote gender equality and to combat discrimination and sociocultural, economic and political marginalization of women and young people, in Africa in general and in Cameroon in particular.

Having studied the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995, particularly the recommendation relating to gender equality and the empowerment of women, Women in Alternative Action notes that, 20 years after the adoption of the Platform for Action, encouraging progress has been made in implementing that recommendation and many African countries are performing very well, notably in two areas:

- Gender parity in primary education. Of the 49 African countries that can provide statistics, 17 have achieved parity and 9 of those have managed to maintain parity since the 1990s (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Millennium Development Goals Report 2013).

- The representation of women in decision-making. The number of seats occupied by women in national parliaments has increased. In Cameroon, over the course of the two last parliamentary terms, the percentage of female members of parliament increased from 10.5 per cent in 2007 to 13.8 per cent in 2012. The proportion of female members of Government increased from 6.2 per cent in 2005 to 10 per cent in 2011. At the local level, 6.7 per cent of mayors and 20 per cent of deputy mayors are women (Cameroon, Millennium Development Goals Report 2012). Twenty of the 100 members of the Senate of Cameroon are women (20 per cent).

However, further efforts are required in order to achieve gender parity in secondary and higher education. In 2010, only 12 of the 37 African countries with available statistics had achieved parity (UNDP, Millennium Development Goals Report 2014). In sub-Saharan Africa, the gender parity indices for secondary and higher education were the lowest in the world at 0.84 and 0.64 respectively (UNDP, Millennium Development Goals Report 2014). In Cameroon, 21.1 per cent of adult women have completed at least secondary-level education, compared to 34.9 per cent of adult men.

Furthermore, the promotion of women's access to paid work outside the agricultural sector remains a challenge, despite some reported progress. In Cameroon, for example, women's participation in the labour market is 63.6 per cent, compared to 76.7 per cent for men. The proportion of women aged 15-64 employed in non-agricultural paid jobs remains low (24.3 per cent in 2001, 24.5 per cent in 2007 and 27.3 per cent in 2010) (Cameroon, Millennium Development Goals Report 2012).

Therefore, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, we continue to face a great challenge with regard to gender equality and the empowerment of women, who continue to be held back by certain cultural practices (notably early marriage, preference given to boys with regard to schooling and power relations within the family) and a lack of economic opportunities (access to markets, capital and professional training, patriarchal influence) and political opportunities (lack of political training).

In order to sustain progress, it is vital to initiate a cultural transformation that will reverse negative attitudes towards gender equality and women's empowerment in certain societies, particularly in Cameroon.

Public policy should be refocused to tackle discrimination against girls and women in the education system and gender-based discrimination in relation to access to education, economic opportunities and employment, in order to ensure the increased participation of women in economic and productive activities and to involve them in decision-making at all levels of society. To achieve that goal, it will be essential to implement economic and social policies that best meet the needs of both men and women. In particular, that will mean drawing up positive discrimination strategies to benefit women, reforming those aspects of customary law that are detrimental to women and girls and allocating increased human and financial resources to the enforcement of relevant provisions.

Women in Alternative Action calls on the United Nations, and the African States in particular, to transform the political will demonstrated into concrete action by:

- Establishing suitable and practical regulatory frameworks
- Establishing strong institutions managed by competent individuals of integrity
- Providing the material and financial resources required to run those institutions
- Adopting positive discrimination strategies that benefit women in order to boost gender equality and empower women, in particular:
    - Harsher penalties for offences relating to sexual harassment, early marriage, the rape of minors and violence against female pupils
    - The introduction of scholarships for girls from poor families
    - The allocation of training grants and fee exemptions for women and girls in training colleges
    - The creation of a women's bank to fund women's projects
    - The strengthening of quotas for women's representation in decision-making bodies.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, we the members of Women in Alternative Action will spare no effort in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women by implementing the recommendations and strategies enshrined in the Beijing Statement and Platform for Action.

We believe that, together, we can help to build a new society based on justice, love and respect for human dignity.

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Statement submitted by World Young Women's Christian Association, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

The commitment to gender equality in the post 2015 agenda is critical for sustainable development and yet is insufficient to address the broad range of rights that are defined in the Beijing Platform for Action. The World Young Women's Christian Association recognizes that the Beijing Platform for Action together with the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and United Nations Resolution 1325 provides a comprehensive women's human rights agenda that addresses issues of development, peace and security. For instance, there is inbuilt accountability mechanisms through the treaty bodies and the annual meetings of the Commission on the Status of Women, however there are still gaps.

We therefore call for a comprehensive recommitment to the Beijing Platform for Action together with any emerging issues as the foundational reference consensus document for women's empowerment and gender equality within the United Nations inter-governmental framework.

Across the spectrum, the national mechanism and institutions have often been so marginalized within the centres of power in governments and have been the least resourced, thus limiting their effectiveness in the substantive delivery of the mandate for women, advancing rights of women and reducing gender inequalities. The gender mainstreaming approach in the public sector did not go beyond awareness raising towards a real transformative agenda.

In terms of the 12 critical areas of concern, the World Young Women's Christian Association movement actively contributed to four main areas related to education and training; ending violence against women, and economic empowerment for women and women and health. As global faith based organisation we are women, young women and girls with our diversity of religion, culture, language, as survivors of violence, of trafficking, as women living with HIV, with disabilities and mental health issues, we are migrants, displaced, refugees, we are indigenous, urban and rural women, we are the World Young Women's Christian Association. It is in from this diverse foundation that the World Young Women's Christian Association provides an analysis and succinct recommendations on each of these key areas of concern:

Education and training

Significant progress has been made in the area of access to education especially for the girl child. However, this has not been accompanied by investment in quality education, gender sensitivity or ensuring that there is a sufficient transition for girls from primary education to secondary and tertiary education, as well as vocational and skills training. In addition, inadequate attention has been given to increasing accessibility to education for marginalized groups. Furthermore, insufficient resources have been made available for adult literacy, this has impacted mainly women who are unable read or write especially in resource poor communities. We call on the United Nations and Member States to:

- Prioritize and invest in quality, gender-responsive and universal accessible secondary, tertiary, vocational and non-formal education.
- Reduce digital divide and ensure equal access to technology and learning opportunities including mobile telephony.

- Provide comprehensive sexuality education for adolescent girls and young women in formal and non-formal settings and the allocation of budgets.
- Provide quality services for education for girls, especially those with disabilities, indigenous and marginalized communities and those in displacement.

Ending violence against women and girls and ensuring peace with justice

Violence against women remains the greatest violation of the rights of women in public and in private spheres, in peace times and in conflict situations. Despite the increase in awareness, women and girls continue to experience violence particularly domestic violence. There are limited resources to support survivors such as shelters and legal, psychosocial and counselling services; and the mental health impact of violence against women has often not been addressed. Human rights violations such as sexual violence and child, early and forced marriage continue to destroy lives. The World Young Women's Christian Association calls on the United Nations and Member States to:

- Step up interventions and programmes that focus on prevention of violence against women and girls, which include addressing the social and cultural norms that undervalue the role and status of women, and greater legal and human rights awareness.
- Address the underlying and pervasive impunity associated with violence against women and girls, whether in communities or in situations of conflict. Provide integrated and comprehensive support services to women survivors of violence, including adequate remedies and support for healing and recovery.
- Implement existing laws and ensure access to quality and affordable justice.
- Ensure economic empowerment initiatives; enabling women to have financial independence.
- Ensure women's effective participation in the peace negotiations, peacebuilding, recovery and reconstruction.
- End child, early and forced marriage within a single generation.

Economic empowerment for women

Women's economic independence and wellbeing is intricately linked with their ability to access, claim and enjoy other rights such as political participation, making choices in health, access to education and living a life free of violence. Many women, especially young women, lack access to decent employment, and when employed, still earn less than men for the same job, and lack agency over spending their own income. In many countries, women do not have access to, ownership and control over productive resources, thus limiting economic rights and opportunities for livelihoods. The economic crisis and the austerity measures leading to the decline of the social welfare system severely affects women; causing the level of unpaid care work to grow. We therefore call on the United Nations, Member States and the private sector to:

- Implement policies that advance gender equality and ensure women's effective participation in the economy, including decision-making in key sectors such as

finance and investment, industry, mining, technology, education, energy and trade.

- Implement laws that ensure women's access to, ownership of and control over resources such as family income, land, property, inheritance, technology and other intellectual property.
- Invest in and scale up the innovations of women in communities, including greater access to technology.
- Prioritize infrastructure development such as roads, communications, technology, green energy sources, water and sanitation for rural and marginalized communities, thereby creating economic opportunities for women, including through time-saving and labour-saving technologies.
- Support market women and cross-border traders through facilitative law, customs and migration policies, as well as insurance, safety and security.
- Scale up investment in and support young women and girls in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics as a strategy for the elimination of gender gaps in key sectors of the economy.

Women and health

The evidence from the Millennium Development Goals review and the International Conference on Populations and Development Beyond 2014 revealed that health is one of the key areas that has achieved least progress. The rate of preventable maternal deaths, especially in developing countries, is unacceptable. Women, especially young women remain at highest risk of HIV infection. Women's sexual and reproductive health and rights has lagged, particularly in the area of family planning. Adolescent health issues have not found sufficient attention despite the evidence of this age group being at high risk. The emerging health issues, like Ebola, have provided a sharp reminder of the role of women as caregivers and the importance of well-functioning, well-resourced and equipped health-care systems. The role of culture and faith in shaping social norms and transmitting knowledge and heath related values cannot be underestimated. The World Young Women's Christian Association therefore calls on the United Nations and Member States to:

- Ensure access to comprehensive sexuality education for adolescent girls and young women.
- Provide adequate sexual and reproductive health and rights information and services to all women, including family planning and contraceptive options.
- Scale up programmes for HIV prevention, treatment, care and support for women and girls, and especially reproductive health-care services for women living with HIV.
- Prioritize health-care systems, strengthen and ensure quality infrastructure, health-care workforce, communications and referral services that are age and gender responsive.
- Recognize and support women's care responsibility and volunteer services as an extension of the health-care service provision.

- Address the social determinants of health, including the underlying issues of social norms, faith and culture.
- Invest in non-communicable women's health issues such as cancer, mental health and diabetes.
- Provide special health-care services for women and young women with disabilities.

In conclusion, the World Young Women's Christian Association calls for a strong intergenerational approach to the implementation of the Beijing platform for action. As the World Young Women's Christian Association our faith affirms women's rights as human rights, and the new sustainable development agenda post 2015 must affirm and advance these rights. Sufficient resources must be committed to advancing this agenda.